

However, Dr. Finn Salomonsen expressed the opinion (Salomonsen 1962) that *T. v. violacea* must be regarded as a synonym of *T. v. plumbeiceps* as, of the specimens of *plumbeiceps* examined by him (Salomonsen 1949) from the type-locality, two had white under tail-coverts, four yellowish and one cinnamon. He therefore appended the name *T. v. plumbeiceps* to the populations with white and yellowish under tail-coverts, using the name *T. v. subrufa* Salomonsen, 1949: Kapulo, south-eastern Congo, for the populations with cinnamon under tail-coverts of northern Angola and south-eastern Congo. Chapin (1953) placed *subrufa* as a synonym of *plumbeiceps*.

The correct allocation of the names available for these white or cinnamon vented birds can only be determined by reference to the type-specimen of *plumbeiceps*, which race was based on specimens from a zone of intergradation between a race with white and one with cinnamon under tail-coverts. The colour of the under tail-coverts of the type-specimen of *plumbeiceps* would reveal from which population it was drawn, and consequently to which the name must be attached.

Enquiries made of Herr G. Mauersberger of the Zoological Museum, Berlin, who kindly examined the type-specimen of *T. v. plumbeiceps*, which is housed in the collection in his care, revealed that it is a male, collected by von Mechow on the 9th October, 1879 near Malange, Angola, and that it has purely white under tail-coverts.

As a result of this finding the name *T. v. plumbeiceps* must be used for the populations called *T. v. violacea* in my 1962 paper with white under tail-coverts, and the name *violacea* must be placed in the synonymy of *T. v. plumbeiceps*. In addition the name *T. v. subrufa* must be used for the populations with yellowish or cinnamon under tail-coverts of northern Angola, the south-eastern Congo and western Northern Rhodesia, called *T. v. plumbeiceps* in my previous paper.

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## The re-discovery of an African owl *Bubo vosseleri*

by R. E. MOREAU

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This note has been made possible through the kind co-operation of Herr G. Mauersberger of the Berlin Museum, to whom all the information about the Berlin specimens is due, and of Mr. J. J. Yealland, Curator of Birds at the London Zoological Gardens.

In *J. Orn.* 1908: 139 Reichenow described as *Bubo vosseleri* an owl received from Dr. Vosseler of the Biologisches Institut, Amani, which is at about 3,000 ft. in the East Usambara Mts. of north-eastern Tanganyika, as follows (my translation):

“Very like *Bubo poensis*, but distinguished by ochre-yellow face and by blackish brown spots on the sides of the upper breast; the shoulder-band, composed of white spots, is very distinct.”

The date the type was obtained by Vosseler is not stated but on 15th October 1906 the Berlin Museum registered another, juvenile, bird, also from Amani, understood to belong to the same species. This juvenile differs much from the adult and has not been described. No ecological information at all is forthcoming about these specimens, and there is no evidence that any later specimen has reached a museum or that any first-hand information about the bird has been published.

In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the published description of the type (sex unknown), it seems worth while to publish the following details of both the type and the younger bird, kindly supplied by Herr Mauersberger:—

‘Head: crown and ‘ears’ orange brown heavily spotted with blackish brown. (In the centre of the crown is one white feather, perhaps a relic of juvenile plumage.)

‘Upper parts: lighter and brighter than in *poensis*, the individual feathers being more orange brown, with a darker line. The lesser wing-coverts are very dark blackish brown, their orange bars being more and more reduced towards the carpal joint. The great wing-coverts of the secondaries are like the feathers of the mantle, of the primaries much darker brown, the light bars being very narrow and much duller. On the outer primaries the dark bars are extended towards the tip, the brown parts being much duller and less contrasting than on the secondaries and even on the inner primaries. The white shoulder patch is very conspicuous, being formed by the scapulars. Some of the outermost secondary coverts and some primary coverts are also tipped with white, but this is not conspicuous enough to form anything like a wing bar. The rectrices are much like the inner primaries in colour and pattern.

‘The underparts are generally lighter and brighter than in *poensis*, the vane being silky white and the bars of the individual feathers being narrower, lighter, more orange brown with a darker line. Many feathers on the centre of the underparts show distal orange-brown patches, reaching proximally beyond the last bar, and in some feathers the last bar is broader and darker. On the sides of the upper breast most of the feathers have dark brown distal patches, which give the impression of spots, as originally described by Reichenow.’”

According to Mauersberger, the young specimen in Berlin, which is just completing wing moult, is on the whole like the adult. “In general it is lighter than immature *poensis*. The head and neck are yellowish white with slight sepia-brown spots; the face yellowish orange buff, with a very conspicuous brownish black line around the face, beginning with the superciliary stripe, and less distinct, greyish brown, on the throat.

“The underside, the wing coverts and the upper parts have the feathers white with two (on breast) or three (on back) narrow dark-brown bars that are edged with orange buff. On the mantle the bars are broader and lighter, the feathers showing more orange.”

On 28th April 1962, some 55 years after the original specimen, a young



Photographs: The Zoological Society of London



*Bubo vosseleri* at approximately six months old.

owl was taken to Dr. G. Pringle, Director of the East African Institute of Malaria, at Amani, which he recognised as probably *Bubo vosseleri*. The finder, Mr. Gabriel Joseph, has stated that he found the bird, able only to flutter a few yards, in the high forest surrounding a neighbouring tea estate named Ndarema, that is, at an altitude of a little over 3,000 ft. After keeping it for a few weeks Dr. Pringle transferred the bird to the



London Zoo, where it now is. In captivity this young bird has shown itself tame, confiding and consistently alert by day. This last may perhaps be a character of the species, if our record of 6.9.31, quoted below, really relates to this owl, because Dr. Pringle has been told of an owl of this type on the wing in an estate near Amani by day. But during his years of residence at Amani Dr. Pringle has heard a 'loud, repeated, guttural but resonant grunt from the forest canopy' on only 'two evenings about an hour before sunset'.

When examined on 13th September 1962 the new arrival in London agreed with the Berlin juvenile in having the whole back and underparts white with widely spaced narrow dark-brown bars, while, as seen in the



Photograph: The Zoological Society of London  
*Bubo vosseleri* at approximately 1½ years.

photographs, the white tips of the greater coverts produced a very distinct wing-bar. The 'ears', too, were white with buff tips; the strong dark-brown border of the orange-brown facial disc was reinforced by a blackish brown patch on the upper, inner, side of the eye. The eyes were deep warm brown, the pale blue eyelid naked, with long black lashes. The very strong black nasal bristles extended to the tip of the beak, which was pale bluish horn, becoming yellowish at the tip. The feet were very pale

bluish, the tarsi feathered tawny, barred with very dark brown. The under wing-coverts were pale tawny, without marking. In April 1963 this bird, then a little over a year old, had lost its juvenile white plumage and the blue of its beak and feet had faded to off-white. It differed from the Berlin adult in having the white on the tips of the wing-coverts so prominent as to form a conspicuous wing-bar. By the end of November, when I examined the bird again with Mr. Yealland the white wing-bar had disappeared. The only white remaining in the plumage was a single much-worn pure white feather in the middle of the forehead (compare the description of the type in Berlin) and a couple of whitish scapulars. It is therefore evident that the type, on which the original description was based, is sub-adult.

In what we now know to be the adult plumage *vosseleri* is very like *poensis* indeed. Comparison was facilitated by the fact that specimens of the two are caged alongside one another in the London Zoo. The series of *poensis* in the British Museum shows considerable variation and the Zoo specimen is a particularly richly coloured bird. The only significant difference shown by *vosseleri* is that the blotching on the breast is heavier and the bars on the underparts more widely spaced. It may be added that in most of the series of *poensis* skins in the British Museum two or three mainly white feathers appear in the inner wing coverts or the scapulars. According to measurements kindly supplied by Mauersberger, the type has wing 346 mm. in length and the younger bird 299. Neither is sexed, but the Amani birds are probably bigger than *poensis*, the measurements of which are given by Bannerman as 276–302 for males, 277–321 for females. On the whole, then, it appears that the name *vosseleri* may be retained provisionally for a subspecies of *poensis* on characters of size and pattern of underparts.

It is a curious fact that Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1952, African Handbook (1) 1: 661), writing at a time when only the Berlin specimens were in existence, give a description of *vosseleri* that omits any mention of the white bar on the shoulder, which is a feature of the type and was prominent in the original description; but it does not seem possible that they could have known that the white would be lost with age. Their sketch is misleading for it omits the heavy dark blotches which are so prominent on the breast. Mackworth-Praed & Grant go on to state that the bird is "only recorded as inhabiting thick forest in the Usambara Mts.", that its food is "squirrels, galagos, bats and insects" and that its call is "a higher pitched hoot than that of other eagle owls". In fact it seems that no definite information about this owl was available to these authors: the statements about food and call were transcribed from what had been published about *poensis* and the statement about the forest habitat was based on reasonable inference.

We still have no first-hand information about the biology of *vosseleri* in the wild. The only area from which it is known is still at about 3,000 ft. in the East Usambara Mts., a deeply dissected plateau covered with heavy forest within sight of the Indian Ocean, in north-eastern Tanganyika. This is separated by some 800 miles from the nearest known *poensis*, in the north-eastern Congo (Ituri). The area where *vosseleri* has been found in the East Usambaras is reached from below by some typically lowland species and from above by some that are typically montane. Hence we still

do not know to which category this owl belongs. By analogy with *Bubo poensis*, *vosseleri* might be expected to be lowland. So far the bird in London is not known to have called. When it does so, it is hoped that the noise can be tape-recorded and that opportunities will occur for playing it back in suitable East African localities, to see whether a response can be elicited. I should think that, apart from other forested areas in the Usambaras good places to try would be in the Ulugurus and in the Ngurus (where I understand that Mr. J. G. Williams saw an owl he thought might be of this species). In all the time my wife and I spent at Amani from 1928 to 1946 we were never sure that we saw this owl. However, with the new specimen before us we think there is not much doubt that a big young owl whose head we could just see in a hole high up in a forest tree on 20th December 1930 was *vosseleri*, for according to my note its head was "very white, eye-ring black, bill bluish". Again, on 6th September 1931 I find a note that we saw a big brownish owl with black on the face fly across a road through deep forest at mid-day, but we do not seem to have heard the sort of deep notes one would associate with a *Bubo* except during one period, March–May 1929.

### The occurrence of *Neophron percnopterus* in Northern Rhodesia

by R. J. DOWSETT AND A. J. TREE

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The Egyptian Vulture, *Neophron percnopterus* (Linn.) is of extremely local distribution in eastern and southern Africa, being confined largely to very arid areas. It is of interest therefore to record that individuals were identified in the Western and Eastern provinces of Northern Rhodesia in May and June of 1963. Although both are sight records, they are well authenticated and appear to be the first records of this species from the territory.

On 9th May 1963, Tree observed a bird of this species—in almost full adult plumage—at Ngosa Farm on the Kafue River in Western Province (12.18'S 27.28'E). Very close views were obtained and it was noted that the tail seemed to be in moult, the outer feathers being white with the rest a mixture of light grey-brown and white. The bird appeared from the north and was watched in flight for some two or three minutes before it circled and headed off to the north-west. Tree was struck especially by the way it carried its wings when gliding, at an angle, not unlike the Bateleur Eagle, *Terathopius ecaudatus*.

Then, on 3rd June 1963, Dowsett observed a bird in full adult plumage at Chapita Dam (13.55'S 32.18'E) in the Eastern Province. The bird was watched circling for five minutes in company with eight White-headed Vultures, *Trigonoceps occipitalis*. Its build and shape were much like a Hooded Vulture, *Necrosyrtes monachus*, except that it had a noticeably wedge-shaped tail. The black on the primaries and secondaries contrasted strongly with the almost white body feathers and with the rest of the wing, and the bird could be picked out in flight, even at some distance, with ease. Its black primaries, wedge-shaped tail and lack of black on the mantle distinguished it from the Palm-nut Vulture, *Gypohierax angolensis*.